



**STATE REPRESENTATIVE**

**SHERRY APPLETON**



23<sup>rd</sup> DISTRICT, KITSAP COUNTY, WASHINGTON  
A LETTER from OLYMPIA

**Winter 2010**

## **Dear Friends and Neighbors,**

The short, 60-day 2010 legislative session is underway, and I certainly feel a greater sense of responsibility than ever before in my brief time as your state representative. The Legislature has crucial decisions to make before we adjourn for the year and return to our homes to reunite with our families and pick up our daily lives. I've been asked many times, by reporters and constituents alike, to identify the three biggest issues that would face this Legislature, and each time, I've had a simple answer: The budget, the budget, and the budget. But the more I've thought about it, the more I've come to feel this session is really about one thing: The people of Washington.

## **This isn't just a budget crisis.**

This is a human crisis. It isn't "the budget" that's suffering. It's people. Family breadwinners in Bainbridge and Bremerton and Silverdale and Kingston and Poulsbo who have lost jobs or seen their incomes shrink. Families whose homes are in peril. Young people who have put their dreams on hold. Children, seniors, people with physical or

mental disabilities. Calling this a budget crisis drains the blood and soul from it. It allows us to stand at a safe distance and argue about it. But it makes it harder to genuinely feel the reality of what is going on.

## **Well, how did we get here?**

If I could answer that question easily, I would. But I can tell you this: We hear and we read over and over and over that we're in this hole because of unwise spending decisions in the past. That's a good way to make political hay, and no one could argue with a straight face that any government – or any CEO, or anyone, anywhere – always makes exactly the right choice. But the fact is, there are Democratic states and Republican states and states where one party controls one part of the government and the other party controls another part. And almost without exception, every state – regardless of who wrote their budget and what political philosophy has its hand on the tiller – is facing something as bad as, or even worse than, we are.

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## That said, exactly what are we facing?

Simply put, government, and especially our form of government – of the people, by the people and for the people – exists to provide services. The nature and extent of those services will always be up for debate, but no one will argue with the basic premise: We, the people, create government to serve certain functions. We create it, and we pay for it, generally with our taxes, because no one has ever figured out a better, more equitable way to finance this thing that we have created. But ironically, and historically, the demand for government services spikes just at those times when fewer of us are willing or able to provide the revenue to fund those services.

We're in one of those periods now. Because of the global economic meltdown, businesses in Kitsap, and in the state of Washington, and everywhere, are suffering, and people have lost income and jobs. Families that were once able to send their children to private schools are pulling those kids out of the private classrooms and enrolling them in public schools, just when the tax revenues that pay for our schools are leveling out or falling. People who lose their jobs lose medical insurance, and our public health clinics and hospital emergency rooms are finding themselves stretched thin at a time when their budgets are being cut because of falling government revenues.

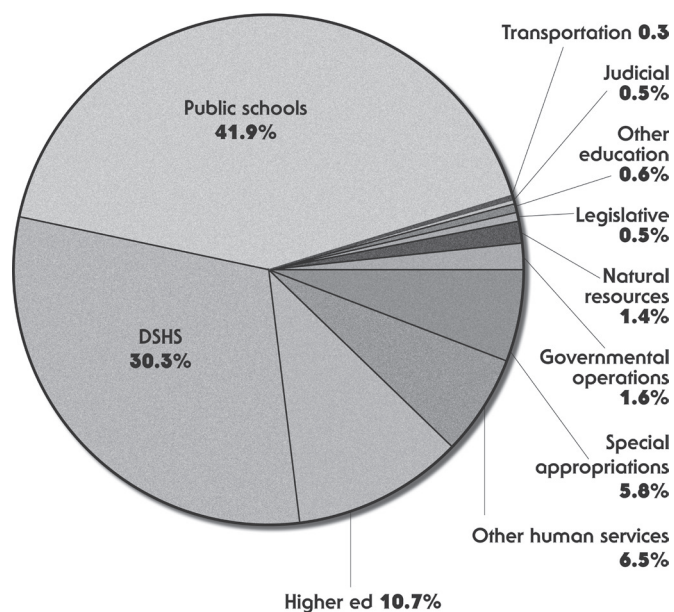
More unemployed people means more demand on the basic services that government is supposed to provide to people who are down on their luck. (And

I'm not talking about the rare person who simply doesn't want to work. I'm talking about good people who desperately want to work but either can't find jobs or are physically or mentally unemployable.) Unfortunately, fewer working people and decreased incomes means still less government revenue, which means . . . well, it's obvious what this means. It means we have come to an important point in our history, a time when we have to decide just what kind of society we want to have. We have to decide what kind of legacy we will leave our children, and their children.

## A Tale of Two Pies

The easiest way to grasp the state's current woes is to use pie charts, and I happen to have a couple right here. First is the pie showing the broad range of services the people of Washington have decided

Over 95% of the state's operating budget is spent in five areas: public schools, DSHS, higher ed, other human services and special appropriations (debt).



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they want the government to provide. There are quite a few of them, but for all the talk about wanting to shrink “big government,” it’s hard to find slices of this pie that don’t seem to make sense.

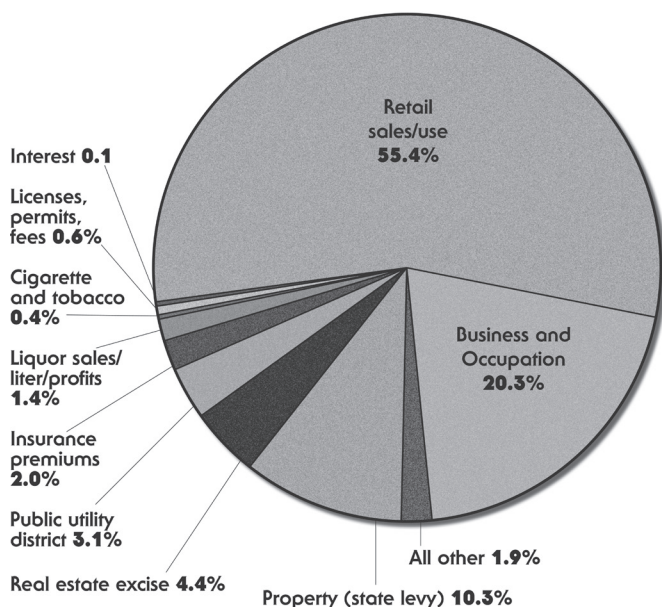
little. Repealing questionable tax exemptions? That seems to please more people . . . except the ones who are benefiting from those tax exemptions.

## The Real Solution Is All of Us

If I’m seeming to make light of all this, please understand that I’m not. We truly are, as a state and as a nation, facing our most serious economic challenge since the Great Depression. In some ways this one is even more serious, because there are so many more of us today, and because we have come so far and have so much more to lose if we do not handle this right.

For my part, I’m going to continue doing what I’ve done ever since you gave me the honor of working for you at the state Capitol. I’m scouring the budget, looking for ways for government to do its many jobs better and more efficiently. I’m looking for things that put a drain on revenue without contributing at least an equal amount to the public. I’m looking for ways to help Washington businesses survive, and thrive, and create good jobs. I’m looking for ways we can improve the present and the future for our children, and for our parents. And I’m looking for ways to mend and strengthen Washington’s frayed safety net, the last resort for the most vulnerable among us. I’m looking for ways to make today’s economic crisis something we can speak of in the past tense, to turn it into something we fought our way through and came out stronger for having done so.

What revenues support the state budget?  
Mostly state sales tax, business and occupation tax...and some property tax.



The other pie chart shows where the money to pay for the first pie comes from. And although this may be a difficult trick, I want to encourage you to try to visualize this second pie shrinking. Because it is.

The solution seems simple: We have to make the first pie smaller, or the second pie larger, or some combination of the two. Most folks I hear from think we need to go for the combination. I agree. But then, as with so many simple solutions, it quickly becomes not so simple at all. What government services do we cut, especially when more than 70 percent are constitutionally off limits? And how do we go about increasing revenue? Higher taxes? I don’t hear a lot of support for that idea. Higher user fees? Maybe a

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It goes without saying that I can't do this by myself. All 147 legislators and the governor can't do it by ourselves. When I say the real solution is all of us, I'm not just pulling out a nice-sounding cliché; I mean this is a time when every suggestion potentially has merit, and my colleagues and I need to hear your best ideas. How we conduct ourselves as a state in the coming weeks and months is going to shape Washington for generations to come.

I work for you, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Sherry

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